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ABSTRACT

The digest addresses topics related to professional training for teachers of gifted and talented students. General responsibilities of such teachers include organizing enrichment activities for students and teachers, disseminating information about innovative teaching practices and materials, and promoting integration between regular and special program experiences. Ways in which regular classroom teachers can help gifted students include being open to the gifted program teacher's suggestions, as well as being willing to modify scheduling, resource selection, and curriculum goals. Effective teachers of the talented and gifted enjoy working with high ability students who ask challenging questions and produce innovative ideas. Career issues are discussed and the availability of six professional tracks (including administrators, higher education personnel, and free lance consultants) is noted. (CL)

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1984
DIGEST

PROFESSIONAL TRAINING FOR TEACHERS OF THE GIFTED AND TALENTED

For as long as humankind has recognized exceptional talent, educators have sought to nurture these abilities. Whether engaging tutors for royalty or mentoring novice artists, teachers have endeavored to educate, support, and challenge the gifted and talented. However, not until the twentieth century has an academic discipline existed to investigate this process and provide training for individuals who figure so prominently in the lives of high potential youth. In the United States, the number of universities offering courses and degree or certificate programs has mushroomed over the past twenty years to well over one hundred.

What Is the Role of Teachers of the Gifted and Talented?

Unlike their regular education counterparts, teachers of the gifted and talented often wear many professional hats. The following list highlights some of the *general* responsibilities and roles of a teacher of the gifted:

- To serve as the major organizer of enrichment activities for students and teachers in the school.
- To gather and disseminate information about innovative teaching practices, exemplary materials, resource persons, and special opportunities for youngsters with unusual interests and abilities.
- To articulate and coordinate adjustments in regular curricular activities for bright youngsters, thereby insuring bright students the ability to work at a level and pace commensurate with their ability.
- To promote integration between the regular curriculum and special program experiences.
- To work directly with students who show need of special services.
- To provide counseling and advisement to students, parents, and teachers in the areas of underachievement, career and college selection, and special problems associated with dealing with their unusual abilities.
- To encourage in students a general attitude of overall excellence, creativity, productivity, and preparation for anticipated leadership roles in areas where potential contributions to self and society may be made.

What Can Regular Classroom Teachers Do for Gifted Students?

Regular classroom teachers are often the key persons in identifying and educating gifted students. They are often the first professionals to recognize a gifted student's potential, or the subtle manifestations of a student's abilities. In order to do this, teachers must be aware of the characteristics of giftedness and the needs of these students. Through diagnostic teaching, classroom teachers can help the gifted and talented gain access to the special services they require. The regular classroom teachers can best help by being open to the gifted program teacher's suggestions and willing to collaborate with this teacher. Together they might modify scheduling, instructional strategies, resource selection, curriculum goals, product development, and evaluation procedures.

Regular classroom teachers can also help by supporting the gifted facilitator's efforts in the special program and by working as professional team members with the other special services staff in their building.

How Can Regular Classroom Teachers and Gifted/Talented Program Teachers Work Together?

A true partnership between gifted facilitator and regular classroom teacher is essential. Both must view themselves as members of a team serving the same students, and not as competitors for the educational ownership of their highly able pupils. Gifted program teachers need to balance direct services to students with consultation with regular classroom teachers. Gifted facilitators can help classroom teachers gain more knowledge about giftedness, develop relevant teaching skills, and instill confidence. Both teachers must value each other's contribution to creating educational modifications for their gifted and talented students.

What Qualifications Are Needed to Work with Gifted Students?

Effective teachers of the gifted and talented enjoy working with high ability students who ask challenging questions and produce innovative ideas. Such teachers are adept at recognizing and programming for unusual levels of ability, differences in learning style and mode of expression as well as areas of student interest across subject matter areas. They are involved in creative pursuits of their own and seek out diverse resources, advanced materials, and unusual opportunities for their students. Further, effective teachers of the gifted and talented display an advanced level of mastery in their teaching specialization and possess a broad repertoire of teaching skills and techniques.

Official qualification requirements vary from state to state. In some states, all that is needed is the desire to teach gifted students, whereas in other states, a graduate degree and/or special certification is required. Nearly one-half of the states require, or are considering requiring, a certificate in addition to a regular teaching license.

How Do You Find Out About Training in Your State?

Universities, school districts, private educational corporations, and associations for the gifted are the most common sources for workshops and training programs. Information about various programs may be obtained from your state consultant

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for gifted education who is generally part of the State Department of Education staff. Other sources include school district coordinators of gifted programs and national organizations such as The Association for the Gifted (a division of The Council for Exceptional Children), the National Association for Gifted Children, and the National/State Leadership Training Institute on the Gifted and the Talented. Your state association's newsletter probably carries publicity about short term workshops (1-3 days) offered by private consulting firms. Professional journals, magazines, and newsletters also carry national calendars of events.

What Is the Range of Career Opportunities for Working in Gifted/Talented Education?

An educator of the gifted might pursue any of six professional tracks. Most common is the direct-contact teacher who works directly with gifted youth. Next is the consulting teacher who aids the regular classroom teacher in working more effectively with gifted and talented students. A third alternative is the state, county, or city administrator of gifted education programs. Shifting to higher education is the professional who teaches courses and conducts research in gifted education. The sixth possibility is the free lance consultant who assists local school districts, area service centers, and state or regional groups in providing programming for gifted students.

In a recent study, the interests and aptitudes most important for each track were investigated. The researchers found that managerial-facilitative skills (conferencing with parents, keeping records, making learning plans) were most essential for consultants and direct contact teachers. Pedagogical skills (demonstration teaching, observing a class, writing papers or articles) were most important for university researchers and instructors and for free lance consultants. Social-consultative skills (work-related socializing, quickly integrating information and giving one's opinion) were also emphasized by free lance consultants. Directive and planning skills (convening meetings, writing grant proposals, having an ongoing, long-term relationship with a group of people) and interactive skills (consulting with colleagues, organizing and presenting material) were most needed by administrators.

By asking "Which profile do I fit best?" you can select a career path for gifted education, or add a new dimension to an existing position (for example, being a free lance consultant as well as a consulting teacher). Each path also may involve decisions about certification, a degree program, or other training. A good person/position fit helps to avoid "teacher burnout" and is basic to success in this multifaceted field.

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